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ELK BROUGHT BACK TO OLD HAUNTS
IN BLUE RIVER COUNTRY, ARIZONA

The Blue River Country of Arizona, where forty years ago thousands of elk ranged the hills, will once more be the home of a herd of these handsome American big game animals.

The Arizona State Game Department and the Forest Service and Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture and local interests, have just placed a herd of 23 elk on the Blue Range game refuge in the Apache National Forest.

At one time the Blue River Country harbored thousands of elk, deer and wild turkeys, and early settlers tell of bringing back six-mule-team wagons loaded with elk killed for holiday feasts. With the entry of the cattlemen and settlers in the country around the headwaters of the Blue and Little Colorado Rivers in the early eighties, however, the big game began to disappear. Since the regulation of the ranges was put into effect by the Forest Service, the deer and turkey have come back to some extent, but the last elk was killed in this region, near Mount Ord in 1898.

Although the Indians and settlers did some hunting in the Blue Range, it is believed the depletion of the ranges by dense stocking with cattle was the principal cause of the extermination of the elk.

Before the new herd was turned loose on the Blue Range, the very few local settlers were apprised of the possibility that the elk might do some

damage to farm crops in the vicinity should they multiply rapidly, but there was practically no opposition to placing them there. The farmers were enthusiastically in favor of it, and when the elk actually arrived there was a great deal of interest evinced by the local population. Sportsmen in the vicinity contributed toward the cost of establishing the herd. It is expected the elk will again become sufficiently numerous there to furnish a certain amount of hunting each fall to remove the surplus.

The elk liberated in the Blue Range were brought from the Yellowstone National Park. When they were liberated, each one had to be dragged out of the truck with ropes, but once in the open again, they left at a run for the high points on either side of the canyon, appearing little the worse for the trip. There were turned loose seventeen grown cows, two yearling heifers, one two-year-old and three yearling bulls.

The Blue Range refuge comprises one of the largest remaining wildernesses in the Southwest, where, it is thought, crop damage by the elk will remain at a minimum. It is rough country, almost uninhabited, and the newly established herd is expected to thrive.

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